

THE GERMAN DIALECT OF
EASTERN YORK COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

BY
JOHN WILLIAM FREY
A.B., Dickinson College, 1937
M.A., University of Illinois, 1939

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
GERMAN IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, 1941

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INTRODUCTION

The Pennsylvania German (PaG) dialect treated in this study is spoken by a relatively small group of people in the eastern half of York Co., Pa. This region lies between the Susquehanna River on the east and York City on the west, and extends from the southern part of Chanceford Township to the northern part of Hellam Township; it includes roughly the townships of Hellam, Springetsbury, Spring Garden, York, Windsor, Lower Windsor, Chanceford, and the city of York. My study was concentrated, however, on the speech of Lower Windsor, where most of my informants were relatives or friends since childhood.

The informants may be classified into four groups: (1) ages 60 and above speak the dialect fluently and prefer to use it; (2) ages 50-60 can speak fluent dialect but prefer English; (3) ages 40-50 can understand the dialect, but do not speak it; (4) ages 30-40 and many up to 30 understand only a few words or phrases. None of the informants can read or write German; there has been no German instruction nor German preaching for approximately three generations. The dialect is therefore rapidly dying out and has had no revival such as is present in the counties east of the Susquehanna. One Mennonite church near Stony Brook has German service on alternate Sundays; the Dunker church at Golden has discontinued the use of German.

This region is a fairly coherent and unified section and its inhabitants are closely bound socially and economically. The fact that the chief industry is the manufacture of hand-made cigars and that tobacco raising is carried on to a large extent helps make these people be dependent upon each other for a living. In addition, the farmers trade with one another,

especially at almost daily markets in York, attend sales in the region, congregate at country "picnics" (festivals given by churches and other organizations for the purpose of raising money), church activities, and similar social gatherings.

The early history of York Co. is fairly accurately treated in G. R. Prowell's *History of York County Pennsylvania* (Chicago, Beers, 1907). In regard to the German settlers Prowell and other historians seem to indicate a large immigration of Palatines. This and the fact that the dialect studied here has practically no Alemannic features (save what may be also found in the Palatinate) prove the absurdity of the traditional assumption that the York (and Lancaster) Co. dialect is marked by a large number of Swiss characteristics.

PART ONE

PHONOLOGY

The primary phonemes of the Eastern York County (EYC) dialect according to their physiological categories of articulation are as follows (for convenience I am making some deviations from the phonetic system employed in the dissertation):

Non-Syllabics:	Labial	Dental	Dorsal
stops (always voiceless)			
aspirated fortes	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>k</i>
unaspirated lenes	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>
spirants: voiceless		<i>f, s, S</i>	<i>h, x</i>
		(S=German sch)	(<i>x</i> velar, <i>ç</i> palatal)
voiced		<i>w-v</i>	<i>j, γ</i>
affricates, voiceless		<i>ds, (dS)</i>	
nasals	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ñ</i>
			(German ng)
liquids		<i>l, r</i>	

Syllabics:

short vowels: high *i, u* mid *e, o* low *a*

long vowels: high *i:*, *u:* mid *e:*, *o:* low back with rounding *â:*

diphthongs: *ae, a:è, oe* (similar to German *ei, au, eu*)

Note: *è* (usually inverted *e*) is a slurred vowel, Shva. *R* is a mid-low mixed vowel (vocalized *r*). *æ* (short and long) is an open phonetic variation of the *e*-phoneme; it occurs usually before *R*.

A survey of these phonemes and their functional sets shows the following outstanding features of the phonetic structure of the EYC dialect: (1) *p, t, k*, occur only initially and only before vowels; *t* does not occur in native words, but only in NHG or E loan-words. (2) *x, γ, ñ*, do not occur initially. (3) *w, v, γ, j, r* do not occur finally; final *r* is vocalized to *R*. Certain correlations (historical and morphemic) exist between stops and spirants so that: *b* may be represented medially by *v*, as in *halvR, havè* (but finally *halb, hab*); *g* may be represented medially by *γ*, as in *sâ:γè* (but finally *sâ:g*), or by *j*, as in *foljè, barijè* (finally *folig, barig*). The spirant *s* is represented initially and medially before certain consonants by *S*, as in *Sne:*, *miSdè*. E loan-words taken into the dialect regularly follow the phonemic patterns of native words. In many cases unvoicing of or substitution for the original consonant is made. The vowels of loan-words usually remain, or are relic pronunciations from an earlier period of borrowing; the latter statement is evident in EYC in loan-words having a before *r*, where the *a* is pronounced *æ* and the *r* vocalized to *R*, e.g. *pæ:Rdi* (party), *kæ:R* (car).

Historically, an examination of the dialect sounds is incomplete because of the lack of material on the intermediate steps (such as the Palatinate dialects) between MHG and PaG. A comparison, however, of the dialect vowels with their MHG correspondences shows the following outstanding features: (1) the regular lowering of the MHG high vowels *i, u, ü* and the mid vowels *e, o, oe* to short *a* in PaG under influence of

the following *r*, e.g. EYC *Sdan*, *dariç*, *karèb* MHG *störn*, *durch*, *korp*. (2) the complete disappearance of the *r* sound after short *a* when followed by a dental, e.g. EYC *kads*, *Sdan* MHG *kurz*, *störn*. (3) the regular development of a svarabhakti vowel between *r* and a labial or velar (*è* before labials, *i* before velars), e.g. EYC *farèb*, *kariç* MHG *varwe*, *kirche*. Monophthongization of MHG diphthongs is similar in PaG to that of NHG; on the other hand, the MHG monophthongs *î*, *û* are the diphthongs *ae*, *a:è* in PaG (*a:è* is a diphthong whose first member is a long *a*-sound followed by the slurred vowel *è*). The diphthong *oe* occurs in a comparatively small number of words and represents MHG *ei*, *ou* (*öu*), *îe* (*î*), as in: EYC *moe*, *hoe*, *woe* MHG *meige*, *hou*, *höu*, *wîe*, *wîhe*.

Some characteristics of the consonantal system are: EYC *b-*, *d-*, *g-* generally represent MHG *b-* and *p+cons.*, *d-* and *t-*, *g-* and *k+cons.* respectively: e.g. EYC *bal* (soon) *blans* (plant), *dax* (roof) *dâ:g* (day), *gans* (goose) *gle:* (small) MHG *balde phlanze*, *dach tac*, *gans klein(e)*. EYC *-j-* represents MHG medial *g* after *l,r*; e.g. EYC *foljè*, *barijè* (with an *i*-svarabhakti) MHG *folgen*, *borgen*. EYC *Sb*, *Sd* in all positions represent MHG *sp*, *st* in all positions; e.g. EYC *haSbèl* (reel), *Sde:* (stone) MHG *haspel*, *stein*. EYC initial *S* before *l,m,n,w* represents MHG initial *s* before *l,m,n,w*; e.g. EYC *Slo:f* (sleep), *Smaesè* (to throw), *Snal* (buckle), *Swans* (tail) MHG *slâf*, *smiszen*, *snalle*, *swanz*. EYC *-γ-* represents MHG medial *g* in intervocalic position; e.g. EYC *sâ:γè* (to say) MHG *sagen*, etc.

PART TWO

MOPHOLOGY

The following are some characteristic features of EYC morphology: (1) the diminutive suffix is *-li*, pl. *-lin*; (2) the adj. ending for the pl. nom. and acc. (and often dat. by analogy) in the strong and weak decl. is *-i*, e.g. *aldi Su:* (old shoes), *di aldi Su:* (the old shoes), *mae aldi Su:* (my old shoes) (other regions have *-è* in the pl.); (3) the 2nd pers.

nom. pl. of the personal pron. is *di:R*, unstressed *dR* (other regions have *i:R*, *ni:R*) ; (4) the fem. sing. dat. of the demon. adj. pr. "this" is *darè* or *denè* (note that *denè* is also dat. pl. throughout PaG) ; (5) the pl. verb endings in EYC are *-è*, *-è(d)*, *-è* ; the 2nd pers. pl. of *havè* (to have) and *sae* (to be) may have the ending *-d*, viz: *dR hen(d)*, *sin(d)* ; (6) the pl. imperative ends in *-èd* (other regions have *-è*, *-èn*, or *-d*) ; (7) the prefix *gè-* of past part. has syncope of the *è* before *f,j,l,m,n,r,s,S,w* and vowels e.g. *gfunè*, *gme:nd*, *grisè*, *ge:gd*, etc., NHG gefunden, gemeint, gerissen, geeggt (other regions have this syncope only before *f,s,S*) ; (8) the verb *kâ:fè* (to buy) has two past part., *gèkâ:fd* and *kâ:fd* ; (9) of the verbs *selè-solè* (should) and *welè-wolè* (to want to), one hears the infinitives (and pl.pres. ind.) *solè* and *welè* more frequently, but the reverse choice in the pret.subj. *iç sed*, *wod* ; (10) in the past tense the modals have the past part. which is like the inf. in form, even when no other verb is dependent, e.g. *iç hab misè* (I had to), *iç hab ned kenè* (I was not able to), etc.

PART THREE

SYNTAX

The most interesting feature of PaG syntax is word-order. The dialect possesses two characteristic verb-positions which differ from Standard German: (1) in the so-called double inf. construction with certain verbs such as *helfè*, *hæ:-Rrè*, *se:nè* the order is the reverse of that in German, viz: *R hod miç se:nè kumè* G er hat mich kommen sehen (he saw me coming) ; (2) when three verb elements appear together at the end of a dependent clause, the dialect usually has the finite verb in medial position; this construction occurs most generally in the pres. perf. tense, e.g. *as R ned kumè hod kenè* G dass er nicht hat kommen können (that he was not able to come). When case (2) involves the pluperf., the finite verb may be medial or final, viz: *as R sel gèdu: hod kadè*, or *gèdu: kad hod* G dass er das getan (gehabt) hat (that he had done that).

PART FOUR

WORD FORMATION

Some typical substantive formations are: fem. in *-Rrée* (*ba:èRrée* farm, *budsRrée* confounded cleaning), verbal nouns in *-s* (*mae bagès* my baking), fem. in *-iñ* (representing MHG,NHG *-ung*, E *-ing*, some dialect innovations), the common masc. agent suffix *-R* (fem. *-Rn*), and dim. in *-li*, pl. *-lin*.

The common adj. suffix is *-iç*. A few end in *-iS*, two in *-bâ:R*, one in *-hafdiç*, a few in *-liç*, and one in *-se:liç* and *-me:siç*.

The dialect possesses a large number of verbs in *-lè* corresponding to NHG *-eln*, and a good many which do not occur in Standard German, such as *driglè* (to dry) G *trocknen*. EYC has only five verbs in *-i:Rrè*, viz: *blesi:Rrè* (refl. to have a good time), *bro:vi:Rrè* (to try), *karèsi:Rrè* (to court), *leg-Sèni:Rrè* (to electioneer), *rumèni:Rrè* (to ruin).

PART FIVE

VOCABULARY

My treatment of vocabulary in EYC is divided into four main divisions: (1) vocab. connected with the Mennonite and Dunker churches, e.g. *bri:dRro:d* m. (council of church members), *gme:ha:ès* n. (meeting house), *dsu:braediñ* f. (preparatory service for Communion), *faSdâ:g* m. (Fasting Day, Sat. before Communion Sunday), etc.; (2) a few words which may be regarded as High German with dialect pronunciation, e.g. *aesèbâ:* f. (railroad, G *Eisenbahn*; PaG regularly has *riçèlwe:g*, a loan-transl. of the E); (3) variations between EYC, Arthur Amish (cf. A.L. Shoemaker, *Studies on the PaG Dialect of the Amish Community in Arthur, Ill.*, U. of Ill., 1940, unpublished PhD diss.), and the dialect in Lehigh Co., Pa. (as indicated by Shoemaker), e.g. EYC *amènens* (somewhere) LC *arijèds* ArAm *amènens*, EYC *fRsa:èè* (t o soil) LC *fRsa:èè* ArAm *fRkaflè*, EYC *ga:èdsè* (to bark)

LC *blafè* ArAm *ga:èdsè*, EYC *gradlè* (to creep, vines) LC *rañgè* ArAm *Sbinè*, etc.; (4) a Glossary of some few thousand common words, including all those mentioned in the dissertation; this Glossary aims to explain words etymologically to a certain degree. A few items will be listed here to show the method followed (* indicates the word is given in Lambert's *Pennsylvania-German Dictionary* but not the meaning noted here; ** indicates that the word is not mentioned by Lambert):

du:wag m. tobacco. (MHG---)/(NHG) *Tabak* (earlier: *Toback*; cf. Weigand II 1015). Pfälz. *Idiotikon* 38 *duwak*; Elsäss. *Wb* II 2 *Tuwak*-.
 **

-*dux* n.pl.--*diçR* tobacco cloth

-*s-bri*: f. tobacco juice

** -*si:b* f.pl.-*è* tobacco sieve

-*Sdeñèl* m.pl. (same) tobacco plant

** -*Sdrig* m.pl. (same) tobacco rope

dudsèd n.pl. (same) dozen. dutzent/Dutzend

VITA

I, John William Frey, was born July 23, 1916, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The earlier years of my life and summers were spent in East Prospect, Pa., but I attended public schools in Harrisburg, Pa., where I was graduated from the John Harris High School in June 1933. From there I enrolled in Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pa., and received the A.B. degree in June 1937; I was graduated from Dickinson with Second Honors and Special Honors in German. Through an award by the Institute of International Education, N.Y., I studied during the academic year 1937-38 at Gießen University, Gießen, Germany, as an exchange student. At Gießen I was particularly interested in studying under Dr. Alfred Götze. During my stay in Europe I traveled in Germany, Italy, and France, and spent six weeks in Paris attending lectures at the Sorbonne. In the fall of 1938 I came to the University of Illinois, where I have spent the past three years as a part-time teaching assistant in German and graduate student in German and French. In June 1939 I received the Master of Arts degree in German at the University of Illinois. I passed the preliminary examination for the PhD degree in October 1940. In the summer of 1941 I received a scholarship from the American Council of Learned Societies and attended the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Several articles of mine on the Pennsylvania German dialect have appeared in 'S Pennsylvawnisch-Deitsch Eck (in The Morning Call, Allentown, Pa.). At the Fourth Summer Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America I read a paper on a phonological phase of the dialect. I am also the author of a dialect column which appears at irregular intervals in The York Dispatch, York, Pa.

